SLAM-BANG 1

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Unfortunately, the review of Green Lantern, "Doom in the New Age," will not appear in this issue. The unexpected length of Lee and Point of View preclude the appearance of the GL review. Unless a noticeable change in the quality of Green Lantern occurs in the next two or three months, the article will appear in S-B 2.

SLAM-BANG 1, April, 1964, is published by Rick Weingroff: 3231 Southgreen Road, Baltimore, Maryland 21207. Editor: Rick Weingroff. Single copy price: 50¢. No subscriptions accepted at this time. COPYRIGHTS: The Human Torch is a copyright character of the Marvel Comics Group; Herbie is owned by the American Comics Group.

EDITORIAL

A STATEMENT OF POLICY: This fanzine is a response by Rick Weingroff to the general trends of fan publishing. The editorial policy will by based on what I feel a fanzine should be like.

My philosophy in publishing this fanzine has been formulated over a period of three years. In this period, I have seen many zines, most of which were not worth the money I paid for them. This has been particularly true in the last year and a half. By reading these poor zines and by comparing them to what I consider to be good zines (Alter-Ego, Spotlight and a few others), I've been able to formulate definite conclusions as to what type of article belongs in fanzines, what type of article is worth while and what type of article is merely "trash".

My philosophy is quite simple. It is based on the following points:

(1) Every effort must be made by the editor of a fanzine to assure his readers of quality. This should not be limited to including only a series of valid opinions/ideas; it should include an attempt to correct bad grammar! By eliminating incoherent and poorly phrased sentences, the fan-ed can make the job of reading an article a pleasure, rather than a task.

(2) Only story narration which is essential to the development of an idea will be included. Entire articles involving the relation of an origin or a famous story in the career of a super hero will never appear in this fanzine.

(3) An editor should publish what he believes in - what he enjoys publishing. Therefore, so long as I continue to publish and edit Slam-Bang, and so long as reader reaction is not violently opposed, this zine will follow the above policy with only minor modifications.

THE LETTER COLUMN: Going along with my philosophy, though a distinct part of it, is my policy regarding Slam-Bangers, the letter column. My letter column will contain any good opinion expressed by any reader on any opinion or idea expressed in this (or any) fanzine. No comments will be published which relate to the quality of an article! I feel that any criticism or praise which you may have should be considered a personal evaluation - it has no interest for anyone other than myself and, perhaps, the writer of an article which you comment on.

Only by presenting the opinion of a cross-section of fandom can any zine hope to better the comic world. By presenting this forum for fan opinion, a truly representative sampling of reaction to the subjects of importance in the comic world can be attained. So long as writers are as biased in their opinions as I - and most other writers - few articles can hope to present an opinion which even vaguely relates fandom's actual opinion on a subject; only through letter columns can the actual sentiments of fandom be presented to other fans - and pros!

EDITORIAL, Continued

Readers - particularly readers who do not normally contribute to fanzines - are urged to express their views on the suggestions/evaluations/criticisms presented in this issue. The size of the letter column will vary from issue to issue but, as long as I have a letter worth publishing - regardless of length, I will make space for it!

POINT OF VIEW: In this and future issues, preference will be given in the letter column to comments on the Point of View discussions. As in the case of this issue's topic, the problem is so large and so highly technical that not even three of fandom's top members could even come close to more than scratching the surface of opinion. By relating your opinion on the matter, you will bring the discussion that much closer to an accurate description of the problem. Only by presenting this type of forum for comment can Point of View hope to do more than just entertain - hopefully, it make the professionals "sit up and take notice."

Point of View will appear semi-regularly.

READER OPINION: Reader opinion, as to preferences in articles, is solicited; though none will be published. My basic format will not be altered more than slightly, but by seeing a cross-section of opinion on this fanzine, I can attempt to include articles which have a wider appeal for the readers. I won't kid you, however - some zines claim that, "This is your zine!"; I have to admit that, "This is my zine!"

ARTWORK: My policy does not necessarily include an absence of artwork. However, multilith, the process by which this issue was printed, does not allow for artwork at this time. Only after I have gained more experience in stenciling on multilith can I hope to include artwork. The two illoes included this issue are purely intended as experiments - to see how artwork will come out on multilith.

CORRECTION: In NEDOR, an editor's note mentions that DC is putting out Yankee Doodle Dandy and J-Spy. The "news" source is, of course, The Comic Reader. However, as things have turned out, Yankee Doodle Dandy became "J-Spy"; and "J-Spy" was a misprint on Biljo's part. The new title is, of course, "I-Spy."

TITLE LOGO: I have attempted to put a large title logo on each major article included in this issue. Difficulties have arisen which led to what I would term "sloppiness". The difficulties will be ironed out as I gain more experience in stenciling on Multilith.

TYPING MISTAKES: My policy does not intentially include typographical errors. However, many have undoubtedly slipped in; this is not, of course, uncommon in fanzines. I ask your indulgence as far as these mistakes are concerned.

HERO: Slam-Bang would like to take this opportunity to thank Larry Herndon for allowing Point of View to be published in this zine. I might add, incidentally, that a special Point of View is being prepared for a zine which I believe is called Down-Under; the subject is Australian Comic Heroes.

HOW SERIOUS ARE THE COMICS

by Lovell Thompson

ABOUT THIS ARTICLE:

This article, which originally appeared in THE ATLANTIC MONTHLY for September, 1942, volume 170, number 3 (on pages 127-129), is reprinted by permission of the publishers.

THE AUTHOR: "Advertising and Production Manager of Houghton Mifflin Company, Lovell Thompson is a publisher whose delight it is to analyze the power of the printed word as it appears in the Congressional Record, the Sears Roebuck Catalogue - and the funnies."

1

Ever since the turn of the century when the Yellow Press was named after Outcault's Yellow Kid, the war of the comics has been savagely fought. It has been a bitter civil war with parents on one side and their children on the other. Under leaders like Charles W. Eliot and Kate Douglas Wiggin, and publications like the New Republic and the Chicago Daily News, the parents have been winning the battles but losing the war. That is because the elders find themselves regularly reading the comics and have to fall back on that old line: "We read them to see how bad they are." After half a century of successful attack by the comics we ought to be considering the terms of surrender. We should rise above the battle and take the cold long view.

The newest outrage of the enemy has been the comic magazine. It is only a few years old but it is deeply entrenched. The best evidence of this is the fact that it has forced out the marble as childhood's medium of exchange.

The child's marble, curving, pellucid, used to carry a mystery in its center. The alley, impenetrable, unyielding, self-contained, had in its depth an answer such as no jewel ever gave. When you had it in your hand, you knew it was a sphinx's eye. The future that children sought beneath the marble's surface has for a moment almost become explicit in the comic magazine.

If you have ever found yourself guiltily reading one of your child's comic books and exchanging it hastily for the Times Book Review as someone enters the room, you know that there seems a sinful unreality about this superworld. It is too easy and too inhuman. There are no real problems and no real answers. It is a long pro

cession of tawdry Charles Atlases accompanied by a minimum of reading matter of no distinction whatever. It is the world of the Batman and Captain Marvel, of Superman and the Phantom. It is a criminal world and an idealistic world; it is sadistic and romantic. In it time and space are reduced to secondary nuisances. You may have the career of Jimmy Doolittle and that of Michelangelo side by side and Flash Gordon's rocket ship not much more than a stone's throw from Jimmy. Can a mind nurtured on this predigested wood pulp hope to have form or direction when it grows up?

Thinking back in search of an answer, I have often wondered why our parents forbade us such comics as Buster brown, who lived in the days of Alexander's Ragtime Band and the leg-o'-mutton sleeve. He was a moral if misguided little boy. His virtues are clear when you compare him with a modern killer of fiends such as the Batman, a fiend's fiend. Whatever may be the vices of Superman, Buster was hopelessly good. In retrospect he looks like Little Lord Fauntleroy.

There are many strips which look similarly harmless. Moon Mullins still devotes himself exclusively to the simple old vice of wine, women, and song; and the improbabilities of Orphan Annie are lost in the flow of refugee children. Will our children in their turn look back and find Superman as far short of reality, and are we repeating the error of our parents? Did our parents forbid us Buster because they knew that Batman follows Buster? (And what could follow Batman I know not.) They said that the funny page was bad training for the grown-up world. It was not a way to nurture the habit of reading and study. That was what they said, but it wasn't quite what they meant; the comics are not a bad preparation for Life magazine or the Roto section.

Today only a library will yield forth Buster and his black-sheep brother the Yellow Kid, but if you look back there you will find that they represent the two sides of the industrial revolutions. Times changed, but not the soul of Buster. Annie, too, has her fixed period. Hers is the generation between wars - the lost generation. Sad, wise, humorless little Annie is the child of Farewell to Arms.

Only on December 7 did the world catch up even to such comics as Terry and the Pirates. Terry had been Far East minded since his beginning in the middle 1920's. He is a transfigured boy scout learning to cope with the wisdoms and cruelties of the East. He seems to grow at half-speed, and even at this leisurely pace it has taken us half a generation to catch up to his time by putting an army of Terries in China. Being Terry minded hasn't done any of those soldiers any harm, and some are likely to read Terry nostalgically for many years. When you read Moon Mullins you're back three decades to the era when father carried his shoes in his hand if he came in after midnight. When you exchange Moon for Annie you move from the old pre-war world to the newer post-war world. When you read Terry you have moved on from the era of the lost generation into today. And when you read a really recent strip like Superman? Do not doubt it, you read a caricature of tomorrow.

The tendency of the comics is to prolong a period by anticipating it before it arrives, sustaining it during its brief passage, and maintaining its illusion after it is gone.

2

Man has always feared change. When he has been shown the future he has resented it. When he finds it in the comics he resents it no less - and he forbids his child to have anything to do with it. That is why our parents were instinctively against Buster. For us the problem is the same as it was for our parents, and it is really our problem, not our children's.

There are only two ways to meet this problem: one is to shut your eyes to it, and the other is to open your arms to it. In terms of their generation, all that is said about the comic magazines by parents who confine themselves to the daily or Sunday funnies is true. It was bad enough when four pages became eight and when all eight came out in color. But to be able to sit down and read sixty-four pages of colored comics - for ten cents - and then read sixty-four more on a swap, and finally become a child with a library of this feebly vicious material, certainly seems the goalless excess of decadence. This is a sub-hell where the devil himself is disciplined.

True or not, this is true for you. In Buster our parents felt a new, picture-minded world and they resented it. Like our parents, we scent a changed world in the comics that our children read and we stick with Moon, with Orphan Annie, and with Terry, finding there a refuge from the front page and from the Batman.

Do not let a tempted eye which has strayed out of the lost world of Mutt and Jeff and Gasoline Alley into the present of Terry and the Pirates and Smilin' Jack Martin go into the world of tomorrow. There you are afraid. There only the men of tomorrow can take it. Do not try to deal with the world of Flash Gordon. Don't try to get around with Zatara the Magician, with Captain Marvel, or with the Shadow, or the Flame, or the Torch, or the Phantom, or Toro, or Lightning, or Captain America and Bucky, or Spy Smasher, or Magno, or Bullet Man and his flame Bullet Girl. Don't slip into the new dark age with Prince Valiant. Even Superman can hardly take the stuff. Leave the world of tomorrow to the men of tomorrow, but remember that the men of tomorrow are the children of today.

3

That is how to shut your eyes to the menace. If you are to open your arms to it, you must look more deeply into your own guilty reading of the comics and into that of your child whose guilt you have cultivated. Suppose that you wish to look into the sphinx's eye? How can the nightmares that you see there come true?

For one thing, when you look at the comics you read and the comics your child reads, you will realize - and perhaps nobody has ever had such a change to realize it before - how different is your child's stake in the world from your own. Before your eyes, and with the dime that he chisels off you, that child is planning the new world, searching for new strength to deal with the old evil which has found wheels and wings. He has already discounted your world - the old world.

His search is not without effort and discrimination. You will find, for example, that a few of the thoughtful people interested in child education have begun to point out that the children who read comics are also the children who read books. They are, in fact, simply children who read. It's even thought that the comics tend slightly to make readers of children who might not otherwise get the reading habit. Children develop definite patterns of taste in comics: some like it hot, some like Mickey Mouse, some prefer to dwell even in the familiar old, old world of their grandparents with the Katzenjammers. A "good" child will select what at first glance will look to you like the worst comics. Each child's selection will give you something of a glimpse of his particular world problem. If you know the gamut of the comics, there can be for you a terrifying pathos in that pile of magazines in your child's life. For there are the dangers he accepts, which you, as you cling to Annie and Terry to escape the headlines, try not to foresee.

Not all comics deal with imaginary men of tomorrow. There is a comic magazine called True Comics. It is intended to be uplifting and is a fight-fire-with-fire sort of tactic, started by Parents' Magazine. It was bad to start with, but now it is full of hard fact in a Superman package. Your child reads it and he thinks that everyone knows that Chiang Kai-shek was a stockbroker who got wiped out in a depression in 1920 and that he divorced a first wife to marry Mayling Soong. He has a method of learning certain kinds of information far more efficient than any you encountered. The picture-caption-diagram-caption never was put to really effective use in the days when our minds were open, the days when we learned the things we remember. In the comes this most effective technique works overtime, and the things that it teaches are very far from the trivial misdemeanors of Buster Brown. This is the making of 1960, for that is when some of these children will find themselves in power.

As you go yet more deeply into the pile of comics, you will see how, under the stimulus of the comic horror of tomorrow, this same child begins to turn to the practical side of the miracle making. Next the shelf that holds the comics you will find a shelf of magazines with titles such as Mechanix Illustrated and Modern Design. You will find them amongst the mess of model airplane parts not far from the discarded streamlined train. With the same affection that you learned to spot an Overland or Maxwell these children identify a P-40 or a B-26. They live in a world of strange machines, a less social world than ours - more lonely; a world where the law is likely to fail and a man must be able to look out for himself. Those are a few of the ways by which the comic is transmitted into fact. And there are other more contemporary ways in which you can watch this unreal world of tomorrow being converted into the real world of today.

4

Our comics are on the noses of our fighting planes; and do you remember where you met the Jeep? He was sent to Olive Oyl from the heart of Africa by her Uncle Ben Zene. He was almost Segar's last gift to the world before he died and Thimble Theatre passed into other hands. In 1936 Olive would have sold you that Jeep - his name

was Eugene - for five bucks. The Jeep was a magic little animal who looked to be by Rikki-Tikki-Tavi out of Krazy Kat; he had a very red nose and all the answers. He had to be fed orchids. Well, there are a lot of Yankee mechanics concocting spare parts for jeeps in a land where there are plenty of orchids and no spare parts.

In the comic world a top-flight German official flew secretly to England from Germany only a short time before Hess did. To a comics-reading child the Hess flight would seem a thing to be expected. Finally, I know a little girl who wears her cardigan sweater buttoned once at the neck and flung back over her shoulders, the arms hanging free like dislocated wings. That's Superman style and it will be a mode in ten years when that little girl is grown.

When I was a child, my friends and I fought a war with lead soldiers that lasted nearly a year. It outstriped the way of '14 then in progress. It became by spring a war with a fluid front based on strong points, a highly mechanized force, and enormous fire-power concentrated in the hands of one man. A few of our tactics still grimly await fulfillment.

So, as the war of '39 has always been my War and Terry's War and perhaps even Daddy Warbucks's War, the struggles of '60 are those that go on now in the comics which we wisely denounce. Like all men in the storybooks and out of them, when we are shown the future we scoff with our minds - and with our souls we fearfully await fulfillment. Meanwhile, however, if you have stomach for tomorrow, don't feel guilty about adding the Phantom to your repertoire. You can have the Twentieth Century all at once instead of day by day. Between Puck, the comic weekly founded around 1900, and Planet Comics you have time on a map. You can determine your progress and know what's around the bend.

It's all right with me. I can take it if the children can; there's only one thing that worries me, and this is: How will those children face their children, who will be the men of the day after tomorrow? After Captain America - what?

Lubell Thompson

((Editor's Note: The editor of Slam-Bang would like to thank Donald B. Snyder of THE ATLANTIC MONTHLY for graciously granting permission to reprint the above article.

The article was presented, incidentally, because of the unique viewpoint it took towards comics. It seemed to make a lot of sense - the editor can recall seeing many girls wearing sweaters "Superman style".))

NEDOR

GLEN JOHNSON

One of the least discussed comic publishers is the American Comics Group. The company, however, has a long history in the comics field, starting before 1944 as an agency which did the stories and artwork for the Nedor group. In fact, Richard E. Hughes, an editor since 1939 and the ACG editor since its earliest days, created the Black Terror and Fighting Yank for Nedor, a company which published such titles as Thrilling Comics (the first Nedor comic - June, 1940), Exciting Comics, Startling Comics and Mystery Comics. Its first title, Thrilling, was also the last title of the Nedor group to be dropped; in April of 1951 it was dropped, and Nedor, which had attempted to save itself by publishing a line of jungle and cowboy comics, was no more. Possibly the demise of this company can be traced back to 1947 when Richard Hughes and his staff began putting out comics under the separate, ACG label, leaving Nedor without its regular writers and artists.

The first title published by the new company was Adventures into the Unknown. This was followed by a line of comics which tended to follow the general trends of the time: horror-mystery (Forbidden Worlds, Skeleton's Hand), western (Blazing West and its reincarnation, the Hooded Horseman) and comedy (Cookie, Ha-Ha, Giggle, et ceteras). The majority of these titles were eventually dropped, survived only by the original title, Adventures into the Unknown, and Forbidden Worlds, Unknown Worlds, Herbie and a single romance comic.

The ACG format of supernatural-science fantasy has done well for the company. However, in recent years the editor and writers have lost much of their originality. Using the lame, oft-repeated excuse that there are only ten or twelve basic plots and that the popularity of a story is based on the twists and turns that the writer takes in arriving at the desired conclusion, the group has "created" several standard story-formats which they have slowly proceeded to "beat to death". For instance, the very familiar "dog story" (faithful pet is killed in the service of its master and returns several decades later to save a descendent of the owner) and stories in which the hero is a "never do well" who manages to save the Earth in some way are repeated all too frequently to be saved greatly by skillful twists in the plot. Lowered sales attest to this fact!

The company has recently made several attempts to appeal both to their dyed-in-the-wool fans and the hero fans. Aside from occasional stories in which the hero has some mystical super power, the adventure hero format was tried in John Force, Magic Agent. With artwork by Paul Reinman who did a fair job - he has done better work in the past - and fairly good stories, Magic Agent proved a surprise casualty of the "New Age". (Editor's Note: Perhaps John Force was merely two years

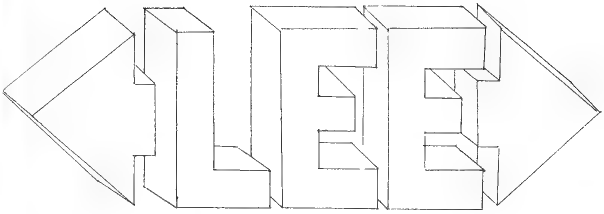
before his time. The trend recently has been toward more "freedom fighting" and spy stories - such as the excellent, though now extinct, Freedom Agent and DC's proposed spy series Yankee Doodle Dandy and J-Spy with King Farrady. Perhaps, as Glen Johnson has suggested elsewhere, guest appearances by John Force in one of the current mystery magazines would be successful.)

More recently, as far as regular features are concerned, the company has created Herbie Popnecker, a somewhat improbable misfit created by Shane O'Shea. Herbie, who has understandably captured the hearts of the perhaps bored ACG fans, has proven so popular that he now has his own book. This character, who specializes in a unique type of super heroism and a level of low - though somewhat enjoyable - comedy, is perhaps too "silly" for super hero fans, but is nevertheless interesting.

In advertising this new publication, Richard E. Hughes says: "We've turned Ogden Whitney loose on his greatest character ever - the offbeat, kookie Herbie. . ." This statement is certainly debatable - particularly for super hero fans. In 1939, Whitney began drawing the Skyman for Columbia Comics; and he continued to draw him, except for a brief period spent in the army, for nine years in Big Shot and Skyman comics. During this period, Whitney created a style that is considered to be among the very best art styles of the period. Whitney, whose style has become rather thin and lack-lustre during his association with ACG, recently contacted several publishers regarding a revival of Skyman; but none were interested. Perhaps the reason was the same which Hughes gave this writer recently: Skyman is owned by Columbia Comics and ACG therefore can't use him; conceivably an interested publisher could easily purchase the rights to this character from the now-defunct Columbia Comics.

In this same letter, Hughes said, "I do think we should try our hand at costumed heroes again. . ." If ACG does decide to enter the hero field (and this may be doubted in light of the editor's oft-stated opinion that super heroes are below the ACG readers) the public can at least be assured of a product which is "different". His writers have a slant toward the supernatural which might have a powerful appeal for modern readers; for aside from Doctor Strange, there is little real concern for supernatural heroes. Further, Hughes seems genuinely interested in the opinion of his readers - a fact which might lead to products geared toward the more mature comic reader. Probably the only thing preventing a switch to heroes is Hughes's long time policy regarding costumed adventures. As revealed in various letter columns, his view of costumed heroes - with their world conquering and over simplified plots - is not high.

That is the ACG picture! Both a continuation of the rather mediocre plots of current efforts and a turn toward the costumed heroes seem inevitable. Hopefully, this article will help speed the day when ACG becomes DC's third competitor in the super hero field.



ABOUT THIS ARTICLE:

Possibly the one thing which fandom has little or no use for is another review of the Marvel Comics Group! Dozens of articles have appeared in various fanzines in which the author attempted to discuss with some fair amount of authority, the creations of Stan Lee.

However, very few of these articles have attempted to get to the root of the success; few have attempted to discuss the Marvel Comics Group in depth and with a consideration for the MAJORITY of comic readers - non-fan members. This article, hopefully, will fill the void in Marvel articles.

This article is intended as a second part of "It's Good to Lee-Ya", the review of the Marvel group which appeared in HERO 2.

In little less than two years the name Marvel Comics has evolved into one of the proudest comic names in the world. The constantly improving, constantly building comic empire of Martin Goodman and (more particularly) Stan Lee has built so much in just two years that a thorough review of the company would probably prove beneficial.

The reason for the success of the company lies in many areas. Originality, cleverness, spontaneity and many other fine sounding words can be used to explain Marvel's success. Few single words, however, can take into consideration the true scope of the Marvel success story.

First of all, Marvel Comics has created a style which is entirely different from that of the two other major comic houses, National and Gold Key. Marvel stories generally involve a super being of evil nature battling a super hero; the story is simple and to the point. The villain causes a problem (often of communist inspiration) and the hero comes to the rescue of whatever is endangered. The beings slug-it-out until one of the other gives up or escapes. These fights take, at times, eight pages - but they may go on for as many as twenty (as in the case of the Hulk-Thing battles). DC, on the other hand, has created a style dependent on scientic principles. The heroes will meet the villains usually three times; the hero is defeated twice but manages to capture the villain in the third battle. Each defeat and victory is caused by science. The action takes place in between dozens of panels of miscellaneous

excerpts from physics textbooks; science is the keynote, action the forgotten. Gold Key, generally speaking, takes a blending of difficult science, meshes it into a story with some excellent artwork and well-paced action, and comes up with what is generally termed a "quality comic book".

With three such distinct styles of super hero presentation, the industry is benefited. This helps to avoid the publication of one hundred comic books which, to all extents and purposes, are one and the same. With three such distinct styles to choose from, the reader will not tire,as quickly as might be expected,of super heroes.

However, the Marvel style stands out as giving the readers what they want. Tests have shown that a child watches television or reads a book or comic book for action, excitement and vicarious thrills. Scientific garbage is not thrilling! Action, in the sense of the Marvel usage, does supply the thrills absent from comics for almost fifteen years. Marvel, in a sense, has picked up where the Golden Age left off. The combination of action and plot - similar to the style of the forties - is easy to follow and enjoy, and rarely taxes one's brain power. This is what most comic readers want!

Along the same lines, Marvel has borrowed and modified a standard commodity of the forties into its products. The blending of comedy into the stories went out with the Golden Age but has been brought back by Stan Lee. In the midst of a fight, the hero will say something funny. This livens up the pace, and improves what might otherwise be a dull story; and, more important, it makes the reader laugh, another thing comic readers like to do. Since no other company uses this style of comedy, Marvel has created a "trend" which most new readers have never seen before - one which they nevertheless appreciate. The generation of readers which apparently tired of action and humor in 1946 has long since been replaced by a new generation, anxious to pick up where the old left off.

Many people have commented (some unfavorably) upon the use of Marvel superlatives on the covers, in the letter columns and on the splash pages. Most of fandom seems to feel that the reader should decide what a story is like; they shouldn't be told. But, oddly enough, another reason for the success of Marvel is these large cover blurbs which are used so frequently. Take a typical issue, for instanc the Fantastic Four 25,and compare it to a comparable Justice League of America issue, the first with the return of the Justice Society. The Justice League cover says, BACK AFTER TWELVE YEARS! THE LEGENDARY SUPER STARS OF THE JUSTICE SOCIETY OF AMERICA! Now, assuming that the average new comic reader has probably never even heard of the JSA (except perhaps in JLA letter columns) this cover blurb doesn't mean too much. On the other hand, even if the reader has never heard of the Thing or the Hulk, he can plainly see what would make a battle between the two great - the action-packed cover pose clearly shows the type of story. The cover blurbs convince the new reader that he should buy this book: A MARVEL SUPER SPECTACULAR! THE WORLD'S GREATEST COMIC MAGAZINE! THIS IS THE BIG ONE! THE INCREDIBLE HULK VERSUS THE THING! BRINGING THE MARVEL AGE OF COMICS TO A LOFTY NEW PINNACLE OF GREATNESS! PAGE AFTER PAGE OF PULSE POUNDING THRILLS! THE BATTLE OF THE CENTURY! Inevitably, a new reader - who may not have heard of the

Fantastic Four, the Justice League or the Justice Society will pick this issue of the Fantastic Four - it promises him exactly what he wants: Thrills!

Leaving these general reasons for Marvel's success, we can go on to discover what makes each of their more popular comic books tick. In many cases, the reasons are overlapping - repeating them seems an unnecessary waste of space. The reader is left with the task of relating the discussion of the Fantastic Four to the briefer discussion of other heroes which will appear later in the article.

THE FANTASTIC FOUR

The premiere Marvel Comics, the Fantastic Four, is easily the most popular title of the group; it is truly the Darling of Fandom! Blending superb action with excellent comedy and characterization, this book has definitely become what it is claimed to be: The World's Greatest Comic Magazine! (at least for super hero fans.)

The characterization - or more correctly the character differences - is probably a significant factor in the success of the Fantastic Four. Each member has a separate personality. The Human Torch, for instance, is trying to become an adult; Reed Richards tries to do things for the world; Sue Storm is shown to be a basically typical American woman - quick to laugh and quick to worry; and the Thing is a brute who has learned to live with himself. Here is a conglomeration of conflicting personalities which offers something to the reader. The average teenager can associate with the Torch's problem; most teenagers try to be a little older than their years. Sue Storm is almost a mother image; she gives the impression of a mother hen protecting her young at times - this, because it (somewhat inaccurately) represents normal mothers is believable, and a young reader can identify with this. Mr. Fantastic embodies all that a comic hero should be - always trying to help the world with no thought of personal gain. His personality attracts the readers who like more standard heroes. The Thing, with his ever-present humor, his pathos and his "congenial nature" provides comic relief, heartbreak of the "soap opera" type and even a little bit of conflict.

This conflict of personalities provides an interesting springboard for sub-plots. Unlike the Justice League, in which all members think the same type of thoughts - all superdoer - the Fantastic Four attack their problems in different ways - Reed with his test tubes, Torch with angry haste, the Thing with lumbering caution and the Invisible Girl with dainty ineptitude. This contrast of fighting styles separates the heroes into four personalities; though you would be hard-put to identify a JLAer simply by his personality, you could easily identify any member of the Fantastic Four simply by being told how he acts. Further, readers can identify with any member they choose.

The comedy of the Fantastic Four has also been an important ingredient in their success. At times, the humor reminds one of "photo caption books"; the panels are written, complete with necessary dialogue and then Lee goes over it, thinking up funny things for the characters to say - just as he wrote "You Don't Say". This humor is particularly dominant in the Fantastic Four - as opposed to

other Marvel comics. One issue, for instance, featured a seven page burlesque of comics (issue number 22), followed by sprinklings of humor in the rest of the story. None of the other Marvel Comics has this great amount of comedy, setting the Fantastic Four off from the group.

The individual members, more particularly the Thing and the Torch, have been partially responsible for the success of the comic. The Torch, whose power is so original in appearance, has more attraction that either Sue Storm or Mister Fantastic. His great power, belying his teenage exterior, goes over well with all age groups.

But perhaps the success of the Thing, considered to be the most popular single member of the group, is the most significant - and astonishing. The heart of gold hidden behind the ugly exterior has lent a great deal of pathos to the story. The addition of Alicia, who can see better than anyone this "heart of gold", has aided in getting over this idea of pathos. This situation, reminiscent of CITY LIGHTS (the old Charlie Chaplin movie, discussed in Richard Kyle's "The Education of Victor S. Fox"), has aided in building the character of the Thing. The situation inspires passion in the younger readers, but does not sacrifice action or comedy.

The situation even teaches a moral lesson, hidden behind the "thud and blunder" technique and appearance of the Thing. The Thing subconsciously impresses readers with the fact that all things are not what they seem; the rough exterior can hide a truly great person. There is an obvious analogy between this situation and civil rights; those who deny a person equal rights are merely proving the Thing's original fear - that men could not accept him. Alicia has added to this particular situation by bringing the point to the surface; for the Thing will not test Reed's experimental formulas even though they might allow him to return to normal - Alicia sees him for what he is and, after all, that is what matters.

And beneath it all, that ever-present feeling of pathos pervades the Thing's character. One can not help but feel sorry for the Thing's plight; and can not help but evince joy (perhaps subconsciously) that the Thing has overcome what might otherwise prove a disrupting factor on his psyche. The character of Alicia has again helped this phase of the Thing's character. Sweet, innocent and helpless, she brings the entire situation to the forefront; there can be no question of the Thing's "heart of gold" when she is in the picture.

Along other lines, the Thing provides a unique change of pace for the reader. His style of crime-fighting is simple and quite blunt - get in there and slug! He has no time for science, for doubt, for fear. He plunges into battle immediately. Few, if any, super heroes allow themselves to depend on super strength alone. This contrast provides a different reading experience for comic conscious teenagers.

The Thing adds a great deal of humor to the strip - both slapstick and a polished - though rough sounding - type. His humor is virtually the same at all times - one line jokes (his battle with the Hulk brought this out). Even the Human Torch, whose light

characterization has evoked many a humorous comment, is not brought to the height of his comedic ability until he verbally battles the Thing. The flamboyant Torch and the ponderous Thing lend themselves to a surprising amount of humor; and quite surprisingly, the Thing generally keeps the upper hand in this battle of the jests.

Another important point if that each member of the group has a weakness - a human characteristic. The all-conquering hero is fine; but he won't go over well with comic fans unless he has some weakness. Though Superman is invincible (you tend to forget this after reading all of that kryptonite mish-mosh) Clark Kent is an average, myopic reporter; any weakling can identify with this character. Captain America was, in reality, a potato peeling buck private and he, like many costumed heroes (such as the Shield) was continually bawled out by an overbearing Sergeant. This can be identified with by the readers; most are closer to the bumbling type than the super hero type. (Editor's Note: The idea for this paragraph comes, in part, from Abner Sundell's "Crash the Comics", which appeared in the 1942 Writer's Yearbook.)

Similarly, each member of the Fantastic Four has something which makes him seem less invulnerable - less of a super hero. The Human Torch has his time limit; and in his battle with the Hulk, his flames were useless. On top of that, the Torch was injured in this battle - hospitalized in fact. What red-blooded comic reader could possibly avoid a feeling of compassion for the hot-headed teenager? Sue Storm is not played up like most female heroines; she is not just an unthinking amazon! Her fits of anger at the Torch, Reed and the Thing when they destroyed her "Originals by Dior", her plight of romance (at one time) with Namor and Reed, and her attempts to stop the Torch-Thing feud are just several examples of how she is made more human. She is so human, in fact, that she seems out-of-place as a super heroine; though no one suggests that Wonder Woman be dropped from the JLA because she is a woman, this is the reason most people were against Sue's membership in the Fantastic Four.

The Thing, of course, has his "heart of gold", something with which any comic reader can identify. His defeat, so to speak, at the hands of the Hulk was still another way of tearing down the aura of invincibility given him by his awesome strength. Even the almost human Sub-Mariner could at least hold his own in a battle with the Thing, emphasizing again that the Thing has his human failings (if such they be). Mr. Fantastic, with his "egghead" outlook, could not appeal greatly to many readers; there is nothing with which to identify. However, his passion for Sue Storm, his anger at her romance with Namor, his frustrations with the group, and his succumbing to a virus (something which most comic heroes would not do under any circumstances) were all ways in which he has been humanized. In short, Stan Lee has created such perfect super heroes that even his other popular characters can hardly rival this comic.

(Editor's Note: Compare the above two paragraphs with the DC batch of heroes - try to find the human characteristics of the National heroes.)

Getting away from the single-character study of the group, we find that the Fantastic Four presents a perfect blending of action, humor and science. There is plenty of action as the Fantastic Four meet (and generally are defeated in the more standard stories, by) the super villain for the first time; the battle scenes are just what comic readers like. Later in the story there is usually a panel or two of completely idiotic science which can easily be overlooked for its fallacies. The story is not bogged down by meaningless scientific gibberish and the story still manages to include some the popular science which DC uses so frequently. This blending, reminiscent of the forties, is proving a major factor in the success of the Fantastic Four.

As with most Marvel Comics (and most modern comics, to be accurate) there is a continuity between issues of the Fantastic Four. The continually reappearing villains provide a marvelous continuity between stories; bringing back an old villain builds a constant characterization. The Yancy Street Gang adds not only to the comic relief, but to the actual story plot - on several occasions the group has assisted the Thing. Again, their continuous, minor role has produced a set of characters which the readers know and with which they can identify. Alicia is another prime example of this type of continually recurring character. Her part, however, has been more important for she, being vulnerable, can get into dangerous situations from which the Fantastic Four can extricate her; the actual group can not get into these situations because they would not even tax the powers of a super hero. Having a fair damsel to rescue from a villain is a timless device of action writers.

The villains are yet another thing in favor of the group. Any group that is as powerful as the Fantastic Four would have little difficulty battling a weak menace; so the group battles beings more powerful than themselves - Namor, the Hulk, the Super Skrull, and even Doctor Doom. This allows Lee to get the heroes into situations which are actually dangerous. Since Superman can not be injured, he is never in any real danger - but the Fantastic Four CAN be injured. There is no suspense in Superman stories - every school-aged child knows that Superman is going to live - but in the Fantastic Four, where anything can happen, there is always the slim shadow of a doubt.

Further, the villains are different. The four villains mentioned in the preceeding paragraph are not all motivated by the same basic drive - greed. Namor, for instance, is avenging the destruction of Atlantis and his rejection at the hands of the sub-surface beings. The Hulk is a confused being, not really bad, but hardly good. He is doubly "socko" because he is perfectly human as Bruce Banner; though he is the epitomy of evil as the Hulk. The Super Skrull is the old character - the world conqueror. Doctor Doom is getting back at a world which shuns him.

When all comic heroes battle villains which are all alike, and which are all motivated by the same basic drive, the stories become dull - stereotyped. So long as the motivation of the villains is varied at the Marvel House, the stories will never be dull.

LEE, Continued

A final point worthy of note regarding the Fantastic Four is that this group (and several other Marvel heroes - notably the X-Men) actually practices - exercises! Superman never needs a work-out to be in top fighting condition. The Flash never has to limber up his legs; and the closest Green Lantern has ever come to exercise was the time he tested the range of his power ring control. But the Fantastic Four and the X-Men are human enough to "get out of shape". By practicing they stay in top physical condition and, more importantly, impress the readers with yet another of their human characteristics - a weakness, but a human one. Though perhaps overdone (what with those elaborate exercise courses of the X-Men and the Torch), this exercise cannot help but attract anyone who realizes that every athlete must exercise (be it at "spring training" or before an important track meet).

THE X-MEN

The X-Men present an unusually striking analogy to the Fantastic Four. The Beast was intended as a Thing imitation (just as the Hulk was originally intended to capture the Thing flavor in the Avengers)! The Iceman uses his powers basically in the same way that the Torch uses his his. There is an undercurrent of comedy. The analogy goes on but does not bear repeating here. (Editor's Note: See Rocket's Blast 22, September, 1963, under the "Rocketeer Gossip" heading for a discussion of this analogy.) Though Jeddak has argued that the important point is not the imitation but the fact that there are differences, this seems a fog-headed way of viewing the group for, despite the characterization, the stories could be transplanted to the Baxter Building with very little difficulty.

The X-Men do use several of the qualities which have made the Fantastic Four famous (though this is typical of the Marvel heroes). The stories are geared for action - even more so than in the Fantastic Four, because of the ever-present exercise sessions in each issue. There is a level of comedy similar to that of the Fantastic Four.

But the group also includes a self which is unique - though it borrows an idea of the Fantastic Four, namely, human characteristics. They are even more human the original group in at least one respect - the X-Men must have a teacher! This shows that group is not above making mistakes and allows an area with which the reader can identify, for obvious reasons. Further, the group is composed of teenagers - the same age as many of the readers. The amorous overtures of the male X-Men for Marvel Girl are typical of the teenage set.

The comic has presented - so far - a fairly standard - and idealistic - view of crime fighting. The all-good X-Men battle the all-bad mutants. This is easy for the reader to see and is, basically, not a new idea. Just as old-time "flickers" had the hero in which and the villain in black, the X-Men and their villains are easily discerned.

Basically, the villains have been stereotyped. They are simply evil mutants - they could just as easily have been the X-Men, with

the current four as the villains. It would really make no difference, for the villains have had, until recently, no real personality.

Issue number four presented a very interesting character study of the villains (the first time the villains were really differentiated from the heroes, though the Blob was a step in the right direction). There was, of course, the standard villain - Magneto. However, the other evil mutants were more original. The Toad is a subservient villain who is probably the most hateful. Though he seems a thoroughly ineffectual villain - unable to do anything right - he can prove to be the most annoying, for though his machinations are generally minor, the effect is often terribly distracting. Here is a character that the younger readers can't help but hate. Mastermind, on the other hand, is a man with ability; but he is also a greedy man. His desire for leadership, his aspirations for the Scarlet Witch and his feud with Quicksilver and Magneto, reveal the falws in his character; though his ideals are standard, his flaws make him interesting. Though the defeat of Namor or the Hulk or Doctor Doom is never certain, the defeat of Mastermind is inevitable because of these flaws. Quicksilver and the Scarlet Witch engender compassion on the part of the younger readers, unlike the other villains. Scarlet Witch, the innocent victim of human loyalty, is pitiable. Quicksilver is the victim of circumstances; his professed hatred of mankind seems but a facade. Indeed these two villains, if such they be, will perhaps provide a bit of very interesting development. If, as they have indicated by their actions in issues number four and five, they revolt against the "Brotherhood of Evil Mutants" and join the X-Men, Lee will have pulled off one of the greatest comic coups in history - comparable to the change which took place in the Black Canary and Plastic Man - turning a villain into a hero.

This latter possibility keeps the reader interested, for even the most naive reader can see that the Scarlet Witch and Quicksilver are not really villains.

This type of original villain is proving a major asset to this comic. Just as many mediocre heroes have been saved by better than average villains, the X-Men, which are a bit above the ordinary in comic reading, have been benefited by original villains.

Probably the only real argument against the X-Men is their similarity to the popular Fantastic Four. This argument does not have its basis in the fact that the two comics can not both be enjoyed by a reader; for in fact, both comics are most enjoyable. However, the X-Men will merely serve to speed the day when the Fantastic Four become trite and unenjoyable. As has happened in the past with such popular heroes as Superman, Batman, Captain Marvel and others, a point of saturation will come at which the writer can no longer be original. The comic becomes a perfunctory effort; sometimes, as in the case of the doom of Captain Marvel, the writer/artist no longer take their efforts seriously. There is just a certain number of plots and these can be varied by the same mind just so many times. Once this man has run out of original plots, nothing can be done. The X-Men, good as they are, have done nothing that the Fantastic Four could not done and, as the years

progress, the former group will continue to eat up plots and ideas which could have been used in the Fantastic Four.

Naturally, this is not to say that starting next month, Stan Lee will become stale. The process of losing one's inspiration is a long, drawn-out process; but the continuation of the X-Men indefinitely will serve only to expedite the demise of the Fantastic Four. With the X-Men, the Fantastic Four and all the other Marvel comics to write, even Stan Lee must realize that one of these days he is going to do exactly what DC has done - become trite! In fact, since Stan Lee is the sole reason for Marvel's recent success, the demise of this group could be in shorter time than that of DC - for DC is literally loaded with unused talent while Lee is currently using all of his ability.

The individual members of the X-Men have their strong and weak points. They have not been as well developed, as yet, as the Fantastic Four; none is really a completely distinct personality, with the exception of the Beast. The Beast is an interesting character, combining monkey-like abilities with intellect; the combination, though somewhat incongruous, is nevertheless refreshing. The Iceman seems to duplicate the Torch in personality; he is a bit flamboyant, quick to anger, and a verbal foe of his fellow members. The Angel has been given a somewhat arrogant personality; and the Cyclops seems to be self-centered in his feelings of leadership. Marvel Girl, with a bit of variety from Sue Storm's personality, seems unsure of her abilities. Each is a refreshing different - or at least separate - personality. Again, the reader can see the different reactions, different styles and different characters of the heroes; rather than the paper doll aspect of the Justice League members.

Of the membership, only the Cyclops seems to have any real chance of becoming a popular separate feature. The other members have definite liabilities. Cyclops, on the other hand, has a fairly original power, a potent one and certainly one which could be as popular as any other power; as powers go, his is quite good.

Iceman, however, is too much like the Torch to be a success. The Torch has not really captured an audiences equivalent to that of his forties version and another Torch might be Too Much of a Good Thing. Marvel Girl has not been built up sufficiently to warrant separate attention at this time. The Beast would be a poor choice for a strip also; with a character as similar and as popular as the Thing not in a separate feature, the Beast will have to wait his turn.

The Angel seems to be, however, the most popular member, as far as fandom is concerned. He is, however, the least likely to succeed, despite his "originality" and despite Stan Lee. The case of Ant-Man proved unequivocably that the Angel would have difficulty being popular in a strip of his own. Ant-Man had only one real problem - his imitation of the Atom; for actually, his stories were no better or worse than any of the other Lee-Lieber creations, albeit a bit more trite. DC and Gardner Fox simply created the ideal, super shrinking, super hero in the Atom; he was apparently exactly what the comic buying public considered to be a perfect, small super hero. Ant-Man, however, with his cybernetic helmit, ants and "Human Can-

nonball" act, was considered inferior to the Atom. The Atom was perfect for his frame of reference. With the Angel, Stan Lee would have the trouble of overcoming the Hawkman's success. His Mystery in Space and Hawkman appearances have literally set the mood for winged heroes - the Angel, such an obvious imitation, would have a good bit of trouble overcoming the lead now held by Hawkmen.

THE ARTWORK

The artwork of the Marvel Group is an important advantage for the comics. Using a style popularized by Jack Kirby (though each artist has been using it since he started illustrating), the Marvel comics have presented the first "break-through" in modern comics illustrating. With the DC style extremely popular and the Gold Key style a basically imitative one, Marvel suddenly forged a bit ahead by "creating" a style which was popular in the early forties.

Some random characteristics of this style would be: (1) a great deal of detail in each panel (buildings, people, et cetera), (2) the use of darker colors, as in the buildings which turn out gray instead of gold as in DC comics, (3) the characters appear more often in full or almost full length poses than in the DC style, (4) villains are characteristically ugly while heroes are handsome and (5) the artistic merits of the artwork are far over-shadowed by the action poses.

This latter characteristic of the Marvel comics has been one of the biggest factors in the success of Stan Lee's comics-action campaign. Each artist now working at Marvel can take a series of action scenes and make each one different, refreshing and interesting. The same action-ideas, if handled by a devotee of the DC style, would take the form of one or two panels (at best) with two poses swiped from a previous issue. When asked to do more than five panels of action at a time, the latter artists usually become repetitive, or at least static.

Stan Lee has helped the art style somewhat by his use of captions and word balloons. In a style which specializes in action, a lengthy word balloon would tend to slow the pace. A reader, intent upon following the action, can not take time to read a long balloon; and a reader interested in a lengthy explanation could not follow the action. Unlike DC, which often uses lengthy word and thought balloon, Marvel uses short, to the point speeches, half of which are part of the action (i. e. "One, two, three strikes you're out" or "You fellas sure have a funny way of making a guy feel at home"). The pace is quickened, the plot advanced and, confidentially, the DC style is run rings around.

Each artist, while sticking to the general principles of the Marvel style of artwork, manages to develop his own style considerably. Each, with the exception of Dick Ayers, has created a personal style that tends to vary the general Marvel style a good bit.

Steve Ditko, for instance, has never been (and probably never will be) imitated. His style is distinct, his flair unique, and his bodies angular. His faces are unlike any which appear in comics; his bodies square. But his action scenes are magnificent,

his futuristic weapons distinct and his shading unusual. This style seems popular in fandom but it, like Kubert's style, probably is too original for the young readers, who prefer simple panels.

Don Heck has created the most conventional style of the Marvel artists. His bodies and faces are quite similar to those of DC artists - thin bodies and cartoon faces. However, he manages to fit in the Marvel background, thus bringing his style closer to home. Even more significant to his resemblance of the Marvel style is his sloppy inking. It tends to darken the background and characters; this blends his style in with the other Marvel artists, though one might well conjecture upon how much better his style would be if he were a better inker.

Dick Ayers has created perhaps the closest imitation of Jack Kirby in history. His faces, his bodies, his backgrounds, his futuristic weapons and his action poses are typically Kirby. Perhaps the only real difference in the two styles is in the separate interpretations of features. For instance, note Captain America's large, Martha Raye type mouth on the cover of Avengers number four; this is typically Kirby, but Ayers does not carry this over into his style.

Further, Ayers tends to use thicker ink lines than Kirby and the other Marvel artists. This similarity between Ayers and Kirby, however, has lent to the best art team at Marvel - Kirby and Ayers. Ayers, unlike the other inkers, is capable of capturing the Kirby flair when doing the inks. Only Chic Stone, recently, has managed to rival Ayers's inking ability.

Ayers's value as a penciler, however, far outweighs his utility as an inker. He has managed to capture the Kirby style with his interpretations of the Rawhide Kid, the Two-Gun Kid and the Human Torch; this helps continuity and allows Kirby to go on to new ventures.

(Editor's Note: A separate discussion of Kirby's art style would be useless since it is the same as the general Marvel style discussed above.)

The inkers have each created a different style. George Bell, for instance, uses thin ink-lines which tend to distort the appearances of the characters somewhat; the grotesque Kirby features are accentuated. Reinman incorporates his own not entirely unpleasant style into his inks and generally comes up with a more acceptable job than Bell, though this is merely a matter of opinion.

END OF PART ONE

(Editor's Note: The scope of this article is so great that the material could not be presented in just eleven pages; but that is all the room that we have in this issue. Therefore, the second part of LEE will be presented in Slam-Bang 2. That part will include reviews of the Avengers, Sergeant Fury, Spiderman, Doctor Strange and several other, as yet unpicked, Marvel heroes. Though I had hoped to present the entire article in one issue, it is simply impossible to do so!)

SLAM-BANGERS

BILL SPICER
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Your request to contribute to Point of View's discussion of DC's recent deterioration has put me at a sort of disadvantage; I am not exactly what one would call an avid DC fan and follower. Some of the titles, in fact, have NEVER been on my buying list - like House of Mystery, Green Lantern, Wonder Women and Batman. I have bought most of the others periodically to try and keep up with what all the fuss is about; but I've read them only half-heartedly. I guess I'm just too much of a raunchy, miserable, bonehead EC fan to really get into the swing of it with super hero comics which, by the way, never appealed to me very much as a kid.

That's the horrible truth; and a heck of an admission to hear from a comic fan, isn't it? I do buy certain comics regularly but none of them are DC's - most of the titles I buy and read regularly are Marvels, and one or two Gold Key books.

One of your questions, however, can be commented on - the one regarding DC's science fiction titles. The DC concept of SF is so atrocious and so juvenile that I don't think it makes any difference who edits the stuff. Schwartz, Schiff, Boltinoff or the office boy at DC - it would all come out the same: bad!

Of course I'm not sure that you are correct in terming this a deterioration. Recalling my childhood, I was never particularly impressed by DC comics. The only one I read with reasonable regularity was Batman. I have a few old DC mags here - all titles and varieties - and, if anything at all, they seem to be inferior in some ways to the current DC books. So, in my own instance, I cannot say that any contempt for them stems from their possible deterioration.

My main gripe - and it applies to Marvel and Gold Key as well as to DC - lies in their publishing "concept" or "policy" rather than in what we see on the printed page. I have never admired any publisher, in comics or in any other sort of field, who was afraid to experiment - afraid to offer material which veers away from the accepted norm. . .afraid to upgrade their output.

I guess this is why I liked EC so much. Throughout their existence they always offered something which was not only different but vastly superior as well. It is true that they did strike out once in a while, and sometimes went overboard on blood-and-guts, but what seems important to me was their publish-

ing "concept" - culminating, of course, in the ill-fated New Direction titles which were doomed to failure from the start. But at least they weren't afraid of trying something different!

The comic houses today are intent only on producing comics which sell to the large juvenile audience; which is as it should be, I suppose, because if they didn't, they'd be out of business in a hurry - same as EC, which probably didn't appeal to the juvenile market.

Still, I kind of wish that an outfit big enough in resources, such as DC, would put aside a few sheckles to use for a truly experimental comic magazine. It could easily lose money and probably would. However, it would at least help satisfy their "creative urge" - if such a thing exists in any of DC's personel. It's too bad that they regard comics as merely a business instead of a potential art form; EC began to scratch the surface of this form during their halcyon days and did a pretty good job of it. Unfortunately for them, they put all their eggs in one basket and went the experimental route all at one time, hoping the stuff would sell; and as we all know, it didn't.

Now that I think about it, a single-title, experimental comic from each of the three major publishers - Dell, Gold Key and particularly DC - might be a good idea; all three have the money to back such a venture and, to everyone's surprise, the darn thing just might sell well enough to make a profit - particularly if it includes science fiction and horror stories.

To sum it all up: DC would probably refuse to try this idea of a single title - as would the other publishers. EC, on the other hand, was willing to try a whole boatload of titles. In my opinion, this creates one heck of a gap between publishing concepts - and DC comes off at the short end.

DON FOOTE
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On the DC downtrend, it's hard to say. I'm not exactly a rambler on that point. I'd say that the deterioration was caused mainly by the fact that heroes weren't the main sellers at DC during the early fifties, and writers just didn't give a darn about the stories. Then a new, hero-minded generation came along and demanded science fiction based stories. Hero writers, in an attempt to widen their market, included SF in rather ridiculous proportions to hero characters. It almost seems as if the kids of today care more about the villain than the hero. Since fandom is so small, we have little or no say in the matter. Today's stories are written just to sell and not especially to enjoy. It's well known that a good cover sells much faster than a good story. So, as they used to say, "you can't fight the power of the dime."

> Certainly DC will never improve until they realize that quality counts for something (though probably not much in view of the age level of most comic readers. Perhaps if DC was more interested in rivaling Marvel than in being a force unto itself, National would really carry away all the honors. Editor

BOB BUTTS
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Captain Rickety, ol' pal, what you call "something that really irks me", irks me also - in fact, "irks" is an understatement. (Editor's Note: This refers to a letter in which I mentioned that Superman wasn't exactly to my liking. I mentioned feeling that the only way to avoid further super saturation and idiotic plots is to drop all of Superman magazines except Superman, Action Comics and World's Finest - with Supergirl, her pets and all Kryptonian relics banished to the Phantom Zone.) Weisenger is sick, sick, SICK! As usual, he caters to the kiddies and the girls who lap up this Supergirl, Kryptonite, Phantom Zone rot like so many pups would lick a mud puddle (and really that's about what it amounts to!); and this makes me sick, sick, sick, SICK (editor's note: have you seen a doctor lately?)! I hate them, I despise them! (Plaigiarism? I seem to recall that line from someplace - like your "In Defense of the Giant Superman Annuals".) I sure hope Weisenger wakes up before it's too late. Pretty soon the kiddies'll get fed up with it all and then what will happen? Weisenger will complain that the kiddies don't appreciate quality when they see it. He'll continue with this rot, too obstinate to change, and Superman and the myriad supporting characters will degenerate into nothingness. From worse to unbearable! He doesn't seem to realize that the kids will take anything you give them, provided it isn't carried too far; and if he'd cater to the demands of fandom he could kill two birds with one stone!

As usual, though, he's too dumb; but if you think he's bad, you should look at Kanigher for a while. There's Wonder Woman (and Aquaman from George Kashdan), a prime contender for an Alley Award in you-know-which-category, on his list and, to top it off, he hates fandom more than we hate him! Paul Gambaccini received a two page, single spaced, typewritten blast from Kanigher that would have made your head spin. Paul gave me some excerpts and from these, I get the impression that Kanigher is dead-set against fandom. He calls it such choice ephithets as "the lunatic fringe" and says its suggestions are of the "kindergarten level". It's funny when you think about it. What more intelligence does he have??? As Jim Conkright says, it appeals to the average 8 year old and the below average 9 year old.

(Editor's Note: Bob's opinions on Superman are my sentiments exactly; though I wouldn't have put them so vehemently or derogatorily.)

Regarding Strange Adventures, its science fiction is hardly up to par with the material appearing in Analog, Galaxy and the paperbacks. (Editor's Note: Oddly enough, however, recent letter columns - before Schiff - are filled with "experts" comparing Strange Adventures to these more serious SF works.) If Strange Adventures would follow Impact's old policy, namely reprinting stories by Bradbury, Burroughs and other great SF writers, they might be able to stand a comparison to the paperback anthologies and reprints which currently flood the market. As it is, however, Strange Adventures is greatly inferior.

And what will be the fate of Strange Adventures now that Schiff has taken over? Editor

GLEN JOHNSON
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I, for one, would rather see the Spectre revived than any other hero. Most of fandom must agree with me - the Spectre was the hero voted as being most worthy of revival in 1961. Incidenally, the one aspect of the Spectre that never met with my approval was his connection with the supernatural. I can believe all the origins of super heroes, but when it comes to dead men returning to life, as the Spectre did in the forties, I find my credulity stretched. What I would like to see is a Ghost Rider type of character - one who would act like a ghost, using perhaps Black Magic, but who would actually be a real live human. He could inject fear into villains by making them believe that the Spectre was an honest-to-goodness, A-Number One, Real-type ghost.

I can't figure out why fans of Joe Simon don't get on his back and force him to do at least one story in the New Age. I think this could very well happen if enough people begged him to do it. If he did do it, he would not be doing it for the money; he would do it to please those many fans who followed his career for so many years. Just on the sake of nostalgia, this story would have to be a hit; particularly since he would probably do the job for Stan Lee. This item would be a collector's comic in no time and, perhaps, Simon might be persuaded to return to the field permanently. If Lee could convince Joe to write for Marvel regularly, Marvel would have nothing but Marvel Masterpieces!

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I'd like to see the Comics Code revised to allow (1) the more realistic treatment of crime and the criminal personality, and (2) the depiction of standard fantasy creatures such as the vampire. I think the three non-code publishers, Dell, Gold Key and Classics Illustrated, are entirely sensible in these matters. I'd also like to see the Code take a positive stand on the great moral issues of our time, particularly the right of every human to the dignity of justice and equal social treatment. The comics could make a start by recognizing the existence of American negroes and including them as characters in stories!

I feel that all mass medium should be free to treat any subject, real or imagined; but they should also assume their moral responsibility as mature, intelligent human beings and treat subjects with regard for human dignity. In my opinion, the best show on television treats the most controversial of subjects - the Defenders. I believe any child who can understand the story should have the privilege of watching it. Those who don't understand it wouldn't care to watch it.

Incidentally, my favorite story of all-time is the one in which the Justice Society of America enlisted handicapped youngsters to aid them in order to demonstrate that the handicapped do not want or need pity. What they want and need and deserve is "A Place in the World". Some time after this story appeared, I wrote the editors of All-Star Comics commending them for this story and asking them for a story treating juvenile delinquency. In an appropriate length of time such a story did appear, under the title "The Plight of a Nation". I still have a copy of my letter and I

like to think that the story was written in response to my letter. Unfortunately, this was the last great morality play in the Justice Society and for me, the comics have never been quite the same.

(Editor's Note: The Above is taken from unused "Point of View" answers by Jerry - see Hero 4 for the discussion.)

JOHN McGEEHAN
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Santa Ana, Calif.

You asked me if I felt that DC was "dead" or "dying". The answer is, "No!" despite what some fans like to think. It is true that DC's sales are down, but this can be attributed to two main things. First, a comic book is a "luxury item". Due to a decrease in their own income and a higher cost for the necessities, people are buying less comics. Since children do most of the buying and since these kids depend on their allowance to pay for the books, when their allowance is cut because of a family economy plan, they must cut down on the number of comics they buy. Secondly, and perhaps more importantly, the decline in sales is attributable to the very stiff competition which now faces DC.

DC was "riding high" until Stan Lee decided that if there were money to be made in a revival of old heroes, then it was time for him to make a portion of it. He put out the Fantastic Four and it is to his credit that by the fifth issue, the stockholders at DC must not have felt "up to par". Marvel has turned out nothing but hits ever since then; and these comics please not only the comic fans but the general buyers, while DC hasn't satisfied as many fans - though it isn't losing any money. Since any comic publisher could lose the entire micro-cosm of fandom as customers without worrying about bankruptcy, what fandom wants will never be carried out unless it coincides with the wishes of a majority of the readers.

DC caters to a lower age group than Marvel and therefore they have to use simpler artwork and plots. They aren't about to change to the Marvel standards for the sake of a few fans; and one can't really blame them for this. For them to do so, they would have to take a rather senseless gamble since they might lose more readers than they would gain. Both companies would be satisfying the maturer, teenage readers but no one would be catering to the desires of those who appreciate Wonder Woman and Superman.

Characters like Green Lantern, Flash and the Atom have their set patterns of behavior and one can't even picture them acting like the Human Torch, the Thing or Spiderman. The editors have the Superman and Batman families pretty well set in their behavior patterns dating all the way back to their childhoods. Groups like Rip Hunter, the Challengers and the Sea Devils couldn't be much different than they are now; and Sgt. Rock is certainly not a Nick Fury.

When you come right down to it, incidentally, Fury is no Combat Casey or Combat Kelly. Back in the early fifties, Combat Casey and one of his sidekicks could be a bigger nemesis to the enemy than the whole group of Howlers is today. In short, those old war tales were a bigger farce than the Howling Commandoes will ever be. (Editor's Note: See Mad's take-off on G. I. Joe for a good look at how ridiculous war comics can be at times. Even though it is intended to be funny, G. I. Shmoe rang home on a few points.)

Wonder Woman is the nemesis of fandom - what with her three selves and her mother being used as a family. Even her love sick teenage beaus are too much for many fans to stomach; and her excuse for not marrying Steve Trevor is even more farcical. (She'll die an old maid if she intends to wait for crime and injustice to become obsolete before marrying.) The general public goes for this slop though, as witness the sales charts. Until some change in sales is evident, the fans will just have to pass up this comic since any book which brings in profits will be kept pretty much in the same form.

To sum this up, I would say that though Marvel has the best plots in their comics - with more realism and more of what the true fan wants - DC will stay in business since they have their own rather large following. In fact, a good proportion of these readers wouldn't even touch a Marvel Comic (as witness some of the recently published sales figures). Some may switch when they get older but many will be strict DC fans. Most will probably drop comic books altogether, incidentally!

BOB JENNINGS
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One of my pet peeves is the Phantom Zone in Superman. That such a vicious and inhumane form of punishment (note that is is a punishment, not a correction) could have been created by Superman's father is an injustice to his name and his ideals. The zone exiles the criminals into a never-never land where they are given no correctional training - where they are, instead, left to nurture their hatred for all people in the outside world. It is a gigantic solitary confinement situation, with the criminals shut away from their own time element. The older method, by which all criminals were sent into an orbit around Krypton, with correctional crystals systematically exposing the mind to its own inherent psychological faults - helping the criminal to overcome and destroy his evil tendencies - was about perfect.

Incidentally, Rick, you might be interested in this. Vincent Sullivan, one of the best - and first - editors at DC, and the man who helped introduce Superman to the company, has been a friend of Gardner Fox's since the second grade of grammar school. I believe that when Sullivan was hired by DC, he asked Fox - who had been hammering out science fiction for the old pulps - to work for comics. Possibly such a situation also existed with John Broome. I have seen some of Fox's science fiction work - a novel of his appeared in the 1950 revival of Marvel Stories, titled Temptress of the Time Flow, and a rottener story you have seldom read! I have never read any s-f by Broome in any book or magazine. It is interesting to note that Mort Weisenger was once an editor at Startling Stories and Thrilling Wonder Stories - and during his stay there, the circulation and story quality content reached an all-time low. This, I think is most interesting! A lot of the editorial staff at DC were once science fiction fans but apparently have strayed considerably from the ideas of science fiction. The forties saw a great number of science fiction writers, from Hamilton (who once did work for Nedor) to Kuttner, doing work for comic books. However, they didn't write science fiction comics. Today we have people with no knowledge of science fiction, writing what they claim are science fiction stories for the comics. It's a strange world! END

Point of View

The new Point of View series will appear every second or third issue of SLAM-BANG. These infrequent appearances are caused by the fact that the editor does not want POV to become stale. In order to keep Point of View fresh and vital, only topics of major importance will be discussed here.

This issue, Ronn Foss, Bob Jennings and Mike Vosburg are going to discuss the deterioration of DC! The answers are purely opinion and as such can not possibly express the opinion of fandom in general. Readers are requested to comment on the opinions expressed below (and in other parts of this issue) in order to present a rounder frame of reference.

CHAIRMAN: Perhaps a good way to start this discussion would be to ask you who your favorite DC hero is?

RONN: Well, my favorite hero is Adam Strange. Both he and the Flash have the best DC artwork - but Adam has better stories.

MIKE: I agree partially, Ronn. Up to a few months ago, MIS was the only DC title worth reading. Strange was something a little different - his artwork was good as well. But now, ever the art seems gone.

BOB: I have to agree with Ronn, Mike. Adam Strange would have to be my favorite DC hero. I suppose I stress realism in comics more than some, however, so my "rating system" may not be a true indication of the quality of the heroes.

RONN: You know, Adam Strange wouldn't really be too bad were it not for all that scientific explanation! Though he isn't as crowded as the JLA, Strange is still bogged down by too much science.

MIKE: But the JLA is really where the science has caused a lack of action.

BOB: There's certainly no doubt that the last fifteen or so stories in the JLA have been remarkably poor! I don't know about other people, but I'm SICK of weird looking aliens and their ridiculous super gadgets and plans to get rid of the JLA.

RONN: I agree - the JLA needs - desperately - more human villains. There's all too much alien rot these days!

BOB: I wonder why we can't have a story with a good, old-fashioned human villain. I'd love to see the JLA break up a crime syndicate - or see real bullets bouncing off of Superman's chest instead of rays from an alien super weapon.

RONN: Yeah, that would be nice! Also, Fox tends to get too scientific on the JLA - all that science bogs down the story.

MIKE: That's true! Personally I'd like to see the JLA start fighting on page one and defeat the villain on page twenty-five, without single word of explanation as to who the villain is or why they are fighting him. No wonder the villains are caught - they're explained to death.

BOB: Another important point is the art - it stinks! A comic book has to have presentable artwork if it is going to attract readers - the JLA would look 100% better without Sekowsky's artwork.

Mike: No doubt about it - the art is the most discouraging thing about the JLA. I can stand the poor stories - but the Sekowsky-Sachs artwork doesn't interest me in the slightest.

RONN: It's too bad modern production schedules won't allow a variety of artists to handle the JLA - that would probably be more interesting.

MIKE: Well, even a combination of Kane, Anderson, Infantino and the others would probably be interesting for a change.

BOB: If I had to pick a new artist for the JLA, though, I think I'd pick Sid Greene. He is certainly one of the most competent men at DC - and he is one of the few men who is not overworked at DC. Why not let him take over the JLA?

RONN: If anyone has to take over for Sekowsky, Greene would be my LAST choice!

MIKE: Actually, Bob, Sid Greene would be little better than Sekowsky. if you are going to make a switch, you may as well pick somebody that can really do the job.

RONN: It seems that I disagree with everybody on Sekowsky's art. I like it - I don't believe any artist could handle the work better than he - even though he is admittedly lacking in some places.

MIKE: Still, I'd like to see a new artist on the JLA. My choice would have to be Alex Toth - mainly because Julie would never put Kubert on the art.

BOB: No, I don't think Toth is the man for the job - he's just barely competent.

MIKE: As a matter of fact, I thought he did a pretty good job on the Flash-Atom team-up. And he's doing wonders for Eclipso.

BOB: Well, some of his work is good - at times! He can be good or bad as the mood strikes him. I am somewhat indifferent to him.

MIKE: As Dick West once told me, "There's no accounting for taste." I suppose this accounts for our difference of opinion.

BOB: Probably so - but still, changing the artwork wouldn't chaange the stories any.

MIKE: No doubt about it! If DC would put a little more action in their comics, even with the same artists, they might be a little more interesting.

BOB: What gets me is the way Fox is always trying to put science in his stories. It isn't even science, either, because it holds about as much water as a sieve in Death Valley - on a day in August!

RONN: Well, Bob, I go for the science angle of Fox's work. Though I feel it is a commendable addition to modern comics, I think it is overplayed a bit in that it takes far too much of the allowable area to explain and define everything.

MIKE: I concur whole-heartedly! Fox should give less space to science. I can never understand it anyway.

BOB: I have to give Fox - who I don't consider much of a writer, anyway credit for one thing, though. He can, on occasion, turn in a good s-f story.

RONN: I agree - the DC science fiction, whether done by Fox or not, is some of their finest work. Of course, their pre-'60s s-f comics were better than they are now.

BOB: Actually, Ronn, I have to rate DC's s-f as rather poor. Until recently, with the exception of Strange Adventures, few of the s-f stories were any good.

RONN: Well, the monsteries in House of Mystery and the others is a bit trite, but they are sometimes enjoyable, "honest" s-f.

BOB: No, I still have to feel that now that Schiff has taken over Strange Adventures there will be no more good s-f from DC. SA will probably deteriorate in story and art.

MIKE: Yeah - he'll probably have a Meskin story in each issue.

BOB: That's one thing I don't look forward to. Meskin's art looks like he draws with a rat's tail - a live rat, at that!

MIKE: Meskin's art is pretty bad - no doubt about it. Even my sister, an art student in college, can draw better than he .

RONN: Getting back to the writing, though, I think the explanation for Fox's decline is simply that he is now doing twice as much as he should be doing.

MIKE: That could be the reason for the deterioration of all of DC - but I prefer to think that as far as Fox is concerned, the editor is responsible. He demands that the writer include a lot of s-f, little action and many big words.

BOB: And it's odd that the one thing Fox Fox can't do - combine super heroes and science fiction - he is always trying to do. Even though I like science fiction, I was pleased to see that he had toned this aspect of the new Hawkman series.

RONN: I disagree, Bob - I don't think there was too much s-f in Hawkman's original appearance.

MIKE: Besides, do you actually think that the classic tales Fox wrote with a Thanagarian influence are on a lower plane than the corny idea of a motorcycle with a zipped up exhaust? How this story ever made the Alley Poll. . .

RONN: Of course the artwork is also a factor to be considered. Hawkman is Kubert and suffers from not having him do the art now.

BOB: Kubert has an interesting style of art - I wouldn't have minded if he had done the new Hawkman - but Anderson is also an excellent artist, and for artistic perfection, Murph beats Joe out any day of the week!

MIKE: But comparing Kubert to Anderson is like comparing Mickey Mantle to a rookie from high school.

RONN: I have to admit, Mike, that Anderson has done a fair job of copying techniques used by Joe when he did the Winged Wonders, but Murph simply can't inject dynamic concepts in his work like Kubert did.

BOB: I can't agree that Murphy is a comedown from Kubert! Anderson is more competent in certain areas than Kubert. Joe's style fits the dark and strange, the mysterious, supernatural, dreary and subtle stories. But the present Hawkman characterization depicts him as a standard super hero - of the traditional sort. Kubert doesn't go along with this like Murphy does.

RONN: Actually, Bob, I think Anderson's Hawkman is stiff, cold and hard - Kubert's has fluid warmth, vital to any strip - especially Hawkman.

MIKE: You know, Ronn, there is no argument with preference. Bob prefers the more human Hawkman while we prefer the more mysterious one, a type of hero which DC doesn't have any more.

RONN: You know, Speaking of Kubert and getting back to the Chairman's original question, I think Sgt. Rock would be one of my favorites. He is immensely more interesting than the artificial super heroes.

MIKE: Actually, Ronn, I enjoy Sgt. Rock and Jeb Stuart of the Haunted Tank much more than the other DC heroes.

BOB: Well, Rock is nice, but I can't accept his broad stereotype. He runs through a hail of bullets, wipes out a company or two of the enemy, and never seems to lose a member of his regular squad - or get a promotion.

MIKE: But with Kanigher's stories - which provide action and human interest which I much prefer to characterless science fiction - and Kubert's artwork, I can really "read" these stories.

RONN: Actually, Bob, in a comparison with the other DC bunch, Sgt. Rock comes out pretty well.

BOB: I won't argue that he can be compared with super heroes - any good hero can be. I don't happen to appreciate war stories, however. I believe that any good comic can be appreciated. If Uncle Scrooge is better than Green Lantern - and he is you know then I'll read Scrooge!

MIKE: Speaking about GL, I never felt he was much - in the forties or the sixties.

RONN: There's certainly no doubt that he's become a mere shadow of his former self.

BOB: Well, when GL first came out, he had some pretty good stories - they weren't great, though. Today, GL battles super heroes in uncountable numbers and, for the most part, the plots are nothing but personal duels and incidents.

MIKE: Another problem is the artwork - it's sickening. And the coloring isn't much better!

RONN: I agree emphatically! The color - and this applies to the way Kane handles the composition, light and special effects, and the shading, plus the colorist's coloring - is sickening.

BOB: Actually though, I don't mind the artwork so much - it's the stories that I find fault with. Trouble is that Schwartz and Fox just don't seem to care about the character. Naturally the stories will turn out stale and worthless.

RONN: I have to admit that GL and the rest of the DC heroes have become merely animated manikins, lifeless in themselves, artificial paper cut-outs and any other tag that fits!

MIKE: That's true! With the exception of Rock and Jeb Stuart, the majority of DC heroes seem to be too drab.

RONN: I agree! Characters like Aquaman, Wonder Woman and Superman couldn't possibly be any worse!

BOB: Well, I'm certainly all for scrapping Wonder Woman and Aquaman - with no questions asked!

MIKE: Aquaman certainly isn't good - but there is little chance of improvement.

RONN: Still, they must improve if they are ever to become even a little bit of what they once were. I can't understand all the attention given to Aquaman, anyway - he never was a strong hero.

BOB: But he could be improved by going back to the style of stories he used in Adventure Comics. That is, have more human villains.

RONN: Another thing I could do without it the Supermanism in Aquaman.

BOB: Right! This business of water sprites and aliens and magic every other issue grate on my nerves. And as for Wonder Woman, the last time I bought her, she was running around with Wonder Tot and Wonder Teen making goo-goo eyes at Mer-Boy, Steve, Bird Boy and the Magic Genie - or something like that.

RONN: It's quite evident, Bob, that DC's stuff is slanted towards the grade school level. At least Marvel gets into junior and high school level.

MIKE: Well, it's obvious that DC can't compare with Marvel. DC is always trying to be too educational and too all-good. They lack excitement.

RONN: It is also unfortunately obvious that DC doesn't care to compare to Marvel. DC seems to sell mass-production while Marvel's forte is sensationalism.

BOB: I have to disagree, Ronn. DC can compare with Marvel. While Marvel's heroes are far more original and dynamic, their stories have become too steretyped - a super hero battles a super villain. DC at least offers a little variety.

RONN: I have to agree that Marvel's stories are stereotyped, but their "original dynamism" attracted me more than DC's superior plotting.

MIKE: At least Marvel doesn't attempt to present educational concepts in their stories. They provide much more action and characterization than DC.

RONN: And there's no doubt that Marvel is now carrying the popularity ball, Bob.

MIKE: Again, I think this is a question of preference. I prefer these stereotyped Marvel stories to the boring explanations at DC. Besides, at DC, when someone is hit on the jaw - he collapses. In Marvel stories, the hero doesn't just hit the crook, he throws his whole weight into it - and the crook goes flying across the room and knocks the wall down. Then he picks himself up and gives the hero a fight before capture.

BOB: But DC just isn't willing to change - at least not until sales dip. They will go their own way. As long as the money is coming in, they won't change their policy a bit. If a sudden and protracted barrage of letters hit them, coupled with a proportional decrease in their sales, DC might change their action - but this will never happen.

MIKE: But DC does have some redeeming features, Bob. If they could come up with a few more characters like Eclipso, they might really be somewhere.

BOB: Well, Eclipso could use a little improvement in art. . .

MIKE: In art?!! Toth is doing a great job on Eclipso.

BOB: Well, right off hand I can't put my finger on the reason, but I do know that when I finish the stories I have the feeling that it could have been much better.

MIKE: I don't know,Bob! The unique characterization has been well-handled. In fact, I always have to take a second look at the cover to make sure this is a DC comic.

BOB: Speaking of new DC comics, how about the Doom Patrol? I rather enjoy it.

MIKE: Enjoy it? Not me! All it is is an imitation of the Fantastic Four! The art is disgusting and the coloring stinks! I wouldn't pay 12¢ for this comic if DC loaned me a dime!

BOB: Well, the art is nothing much but the stories appeal to me. They have good solid characters - and good solid plots. They don't have super villains or aliens - their adventures seem unique.

RONN: I've never read either Doom Patrol or Eclipso, though from looking at each I can say that they seem to need some improvement. But to change the subject, neither of you mentioned Gold Key before. What do you think of this company?

BOB: We were comparing Marvel and DC, but I don't think either can compare with Gold Key, This is because, first, Gold Key isn't hampered by any code restrictions. Also, they have never run a line of super heroes before and aren't restricted by stereotyped ideas on how things should be done.

RONN: I concur, Bob! They produce, sheer, pure quality - nothing rushed, no poor coloring, and the people don't work seventy-five issues ahead of the book on the market.

BOB: Well, Gold Key has made strides in all directions. But I don't think they'll last too long with their original material. They, like the old Dell title, are mainly interested in funny books.

RONN: I have to disagree! More than likely, Gold Key will be the leader when DC and Marvel have burned themselves out. This company will probably be linked in the future with quality, just as EC is linked with quality in the past.

BOB: Perhaps so! Right now they seem to be between top-selling funny animal titles. Their old standbys aren't going over as well as they used to - so they've attempted to get into the hero field. Unlike many of the other companies, their staff seems to have an honest interest in what they do and so they naturally produce better comics.

MIKE: Gold Key has one thing that none of the other companies have - and that's editors! Stan Lee, a great writer, comes up with great ideas - but he rushes his artists too much. Kanigher is fairly good - he has Kubert and backs him to the last iota, so I say more power to him. Schwartz, however, is the editor I have the least respect for - he is the worst editor at DC. Gold Key has Bill Harris and his two co-editors. If they had more to work with, Gold Key would be the greatest company around. I'll back Harris all the way!

RONN: There's no doubt that Gold Key produces pure, unadulterated GOOD comics - the finest on the market!

BOB: But some of their stuff is a farce! The Phantom, for instance, is enjoyed by many fans, but he is merely redrawn from old comic strip adventures. And I'm still not pleased with the way Doctor Solar turned out - even though some of my closest friends like him.

MIKE: Well, Gold Key is hard to figure! Their color work and most of their art is simply spectacular. In fact, I rather like the way Doctor Solar and the others are presented. But they just don't have that much to work with. And if they perhaps had a few more striking artists, they would be the lead company.

RONN: Well, Gold Key is moving up fast as far as popularity is concerned. Another important thing is that DC doesn't care about fandom - Marvel tries to care - but Gold Key really does care!

BOB: That's true; DC is using fandom to its own benefit. When DC can provide something which can compare with Magnus and when Marvel can present something that can compare with Korak, then the comics industry can really rejoice!

MIKE: I rather think that DC does have comparable material. Eclipse matches Magnus, and Sergeant Rock matches Korak. Marvel has Spiderman to match Magnus, and Doc Strange to match Korak. Gold Key has an all-around better company, but the other companies have their good points.

CHAIRMAN: I'm going to have to break this up here. The old Slam-Bang editor can't afford too many more pages this issue. Would any of you care to make any closing statements?

BOB: Rick, someone mentioned before that DC is geared toward grade school students. You know, this is very true! The few times Julie bothered to answer my comments, he always ended his letters by saying that I evalue on an adult basis, while his comics are geared toward very young teenagers. This seems to be the whole attitude at DC - they can write slop because none

of the readers care. Slop is easier to write - and you can mass produce it, as Marvel and DC have proven. The basic flaw in this thinking is that if we accept the premise that the readers have no taste (I doubt it, but let's accept it because DC does) and we add the fact that a snug percentage of comic readers are adults or advanced teenagers who certainly do have ideas on story quality, then we come up with this thought: the pros should gear their efforts toward the older reader since the youngsters, who have no sense of quality, will be pleased with any sort of story - so long as it isn't too far-fetched. This way, DC could appeal to the older and the younger readers; and the younger readers who would normally give up comics before they enter the tenth grade will continue to read them - attracted by the mature plots. The real reason DC doesn't produce good comics is that it takes an interest in the product, creative effort and initiative to do a good job - and most of the present DC crew lack all of these qualities!

MIKE: My closing statement - and it will be hard to follow THAT, Bob - is that I am against revivals of any old DC heroes. They would probably treat him like they did Hawkman - why disgrace those old heroes.

RONN: I had no closing statement prepared so I may as well comment on Mike's statement. I'd like to see some of the true greats revived - the Green Hornet, the Spectre, Dr. Fate, Mandrake, Captain Midnight, Spirit, the Shadow and many more.

BOB: Rick, can I interject here that I don't think DC has any heroes really worth reviving. They wouldn't revive the Spectre - old, wishy washy DC would never try anything supernatural. They might try Doctor Fate but he was too omnipotent (whydidn't he just wish the criminal behind bars and forget the whole thing?). Black Canary is about the only character worth reviving - but DC would probably ruin her! I might add, Rick, that what DC should do now is scrap some of their current losers (like Aquaman and Green Lantern), hire some new artists and additonal writers, and start putting out honest effort into their work. Even though DC's characters have more potential, the other companies are running rings around DC. As soon as DC realizes that there is more to a comic than a super villain with a crazy gadget, they will really begin to move.

CHAIRMAN: Ol' Rick is trying to save money on paper and Jennings spouts off on another lecture! Oh well, no time for any more right now.

Don't forget, Readers! Now is your chance to spout off on what Ronn, Mike and Bob have just discussed - don't pass up this opportunity to let fandom and DC know what you think!

The Chairman

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Rick Weingroff,3231 Southgreen Rd., Baltimore Md.

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Copies of the results of the 1963 Alley Poll are available from Jerry Bails (22520 Karam Court, Warren, Michigan) for 10¢. Supporting Members of the Academy will receive their report free with their membership cards!

What should happen to The Comic Reader? That is the question currently being debated by the Academy. Jerry Bails is unable to continue as publisher/editor due to other commitments in fandom. GB Love has offered to publish TCR as a feature of the Rocket's Blast-Comicollector, but this cuts the effectiveness of the publication in half, since only 500 people will now be getting the news (while 1000 were receiving the separate TCR news bulletin). The Academy can not afford to publish TCR at this time; and any person who takes over the task will surely lose money - and much time. In order to pay for itself, TCR would have to be sold at 25¢ a copy - which does not seem a good idea since one of the values of TCR was the fact that it was free. Further, who in fandom should take over TCR? Hopefully, these questions will be resolved and, perhaps, one of these days, a new, possibly monthly TCR will be available. What do you think?